

Tudors

A Very Peculiar

History



The birth of a dynasty



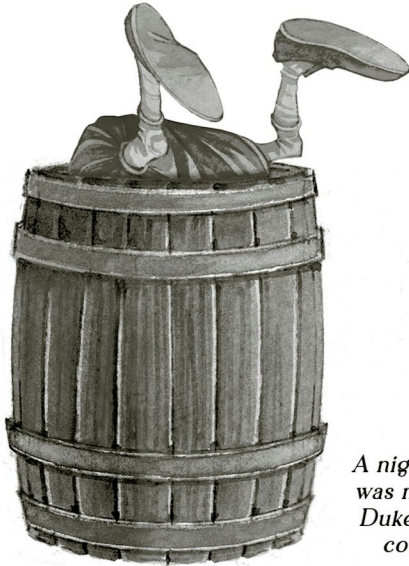
For those who like their history bloody, the Tudor age began on 22 August 1485 when ambitious Welsh nobleman Henry Tudor, 2nd Earl of Richmond, thrashed King Richard III of England at the Battle of Bosworth Field in Leicestershire. As one dynasty kicked off, another ended – after Henry's victory, England waved goodbye to the Plantagenets who had ruled the country since the 12th century.

In Tudor times, the battle was portrayed as a clash of the titans: Saintly Henry versus Wicked Richard. But in real life there were few saints



Bosworth
Field, 1485:
the last Plantagenet
king bites the dust

- Richard was also blamed for the death of his brother, George, duke of Clarence, who was allegedly drowned in a butt of Malmsey (a barrel of sweet wine) after a long drinking session at the Tower of London. Given that Clarence had just had a shouting match with King Edward IV (Richard's other brother), it's far more likely that Edward was behind his murder.



*A night on the tiles
was more than the
Duke of Clarence
could handle.*

No love lost

You may have heard a story about Henry's men finding Richard III's crown in a hawthorn bush.¹ True or not, Henry wasted no time in having himself crowned king on the battlefield. To make it clear who was boss, he had Richard's body stripped and lashed to a horse. In Leicester, the ex-king's naked corpse was displayed in a church for all to see, then buried in an unmarked grave two days later.

If that sounds a bit over the top, we should bear in mind that after years of bitter struggle Henry had a ruthless survival instinct that became a Tudor trademark. Now is probably a good time to wind back the clock and take a look at Henry's past. The squeamish among you can relax for a while, as even the Tudors had their romantic moments.



1. A hawthorn bush became part of Henry's coat of arms, so there may be some truth in the tale.

Bluff King Hal



enry VIII, surely the most famous English monarch of all, was never meant to be king. Born in Greenwich Palace on 28 June 1491, Henry was the third child of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, and grew up in the shadow of his elder brother, Arthur, Prince of Wales. Henry was all set for a life in the Church: no playboy antics, no parties, no six wives and no lopping people's heads off.

As a result, young Henry was expected to study hard. He was taught by a priest called John Skelton, a famous poet and musician who encouraged the prince's love of music. Henry also had a good ear for language and became fluent in Latin, French and Spanish. Later on in life,

"I'll start my own church — that'll show you."

"Heretic!"



Henry and the Pope don't see eye to eye

Health freak

Henry VIII was obsessed with Edward, calling him the country's 'most precious jewel'. He did everything in his power to shield his son and heir from disease:

- Nobody under the rank of knight was allowed to visit the young prince.
- Edward's rooms were washed down three times a day to keep them free of disease.
- Henry personally vetted all of Edward's servants and no-one could touch the prince unless they had the king's permission.
- All Edward's foods were tasted for poison, all his clothes were examined and then perfumed, and an extra kitchen and wash-house were built at Hampton Court to keep up with all the extra work.
- Even servants who brought in firewood were checked for disease.



"You can't be too careful, can you?"

Mary, the Imp & the Nine Days' Queen

Not everyone in England wished the young prince good health. The enemies of the king even turned to black magic – dolls were found with pins stuck into them. Thomas Cromwell's spies also heard nasty rumours doing the rounds that baby Edward was a born murderer. Though this sounds far-fetched, in those days there was a strong belief in magic, and evil gossip quickly became fact. We can only guess how seriously the court took this threat, though it's interesting to note that among Edward's own toys was a box filled with sorcerers' tools, while another contained 'dried dragon', probably some sort of herb.

When you consider how long Henry waited for a son, it's odd that he visited him so rarely. In fact, Edward got more attention from his sisters Mary¹¹ and Elizabeth. Edward also became fond of Henry's new wife Catherine Parr, calling her his 'most dear mother'. Though the young prince led a carefree life as a child, playing cards and dancing with his friends,¹² he wasn't always well behaved.

11. 'I love you most,' he wrote to her in 1546.

12. His childhood sweetheart was Jane Dormer, 'my Jane', later duchess of Feria.